

NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0802
JOHN SCHULZ/TOKYO

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JAPAN: MIKI'S POLITICAL TROUBLES
ANNCR:

POLITICAL MANUVERING IS UNDERWAY IN JAPAN, WHERE A NATIONWIDE ELECTION TO SELECT THE NEXT GOVERNMENT IS SCHEDULED FOR SOMETIME LATER THIS YEAR. IN TOKYO, VOA CORRESPONDENT JOHN SCHULZ AND NOBUYUKI KOMIYAMA PREPARED THIS BACKGROUND REPORT ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION.

VOICE:

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT OF PRIME MINISTER TAKEO MIKI DECIDES TO CALL FOR THE GENERAL ELECTION, IT WILL INVOLVE ALL SEATS IN THE LOWERHOUSE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES -- WHICH WILL BE EXPANDED TO FIVE HUNDRED ELEVEN SEATS. THAT'S AN INCREASE OF TWENTY SEATS. FOR THE PAST TWENTY FIVE YEARS, THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY HAS HELD THE MAJORITY POWER IN THE DIET. BUT SUPPORT FOR THE L.D.P. HAS BEEN STEADILY DECREASING SINCE NINETEEN SIXTY SEVEN.

IN THE GENERAL ELECTION HELD IN JANUARY OF THAT YEAR, THE VOTE FOR L.D.P. CANDIDATES DROPPED BELOW FIFTY PERCENT FOR THE FIRST TIME. CURRENTLY, THE RULING PARTY HAS TWO HUNDRED SEVENTY FOUR SEATS IN THE LOWERHOUSE, STILL MORE THAN ALL OTHER PARTIES COMBINED. BUT THE PARTIES IN THE OPPOSITION HAVE BEEN STEADILY INCREASING THEIR SEATS IN BOTH HOUSES AND THE NUMBER OF THEIR SUPPORTERS AS WELL.

(OPT) THE OPPOSITION CAMP IS REPRESENTED BY FOUR PARTIES. THE BIGGEST ONE IS THE JAPAN SOCIALIST PARTY,

WHICH HAS ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTEEN SEATS IN THE LOWERHOUSE. NEXT IS THE JAPAN COMMUNIST PARTY WITH THIRTY NINE SEATS FOLLOWED BY THE KOMEITO PARTY WITH THIRTY AND THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PARTY WITH TWENTY SEATS. (END OPT)

ALL FOUR OPPOSITION PARTIES AGREE THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO FORM AN ALLIANCE FOR THE COMING ELECTION, BUT THEIR TACTICS ARE QUITE DIFFERENT. ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES IS HOW TO COOPERATE WITH THE JAPAN COMMUNIST PARTY. THE SOCIALISTS PROPOSE THAT ALL FOUR PARTIES UNITE IN EITHER A SHORT TERM OR LONG TERM COALITION AIMED AT DEFEATING THE L.D.P. IN THE COMING GENERAL ELECTION. BUT THE COMMUNIST PARTY REFUSES TO COOPERATE WITH THE KOMETIO AND THE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISTS. AND SO THE DEADLOCK CONTINUES -- WITH THE RULING LIBERAL DEMOCRATS, AS ALWAYS, THE CLEAR WINNER IN THE CONTEST FOR POWER SO LONG AS THE OPPOSITION FAILS TO PROVIDE JAPANESE VOTERS WITH A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE.

BUT THE MIKI CABINET IS NOW BEING SHAKEN BY TROUBLE WITHIN THE LIBERAL PARTY FAR MORE THAN BY ANY TROUBLE FROM THE OPPOSITION. IN THE L.D.P., PARTY FIVE-PRESIDENT ETSUSABURO SHIINA HAS RECENTLY BEGUN A CAMPAIGN DEMANDING THAT MISTER MIKI RESIGN -- AND SAYING THAT THE NEXT ELECTION SHOULD BE HELD UNDER NEW PARTY LEADERSHIP. MISTER SHIINA SAYS THE PRIME MINISTER HAS FULFILLED NONE OF HIS PUBLIC PROMISES AND IS TOO WEAK TO LEAD THE PARTY TO OVERWHELMING VICTORY IN THE COMING ELECTION.

MISTER MIKI SAYS HE HAS NO INTENTION OF RESIGNING AND THAT HE IS DETERMINED TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THE LOCKHEED PAYOFF SCANDAL WHICH HE REGARDS AS THE MOST IMPORTANT MISSION IN FORTY YEARS OF PUBLIC LIFE. BUT WITHIN THE RULING PARTY ARE UNIQUE VOTING BLOCKS COMPOSED OF ELECTED MEMBERS IN THE UPPERSHOUSE AND LOWERHOUSES OF THE DIET WHO HAVE PLEDGED THEIR ALLEGIANCE AND THEIR VOTE ON PARTY MATTERS TO FACTION LEADERS. TWO OF THE MOST POWERFUL FACTIONS ARE HEADED BY FORMER PRIME MINISTER KAKUEI TANAKA AND CURRENT FINANCE MINISTER MASAYOSHIO OHIRA. AND THEY ALONG WITH OTHERS AGREE WITH MISTER SHIINA. THE TWO MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES ARE SAID TO BE MISTER OHIRA HIMSELF AND DEPUTY PREMIER, TAKEO FUKUDA, WHO IS STILL SUPPORTING MISTER MIKI. HE AND OTHERS ARE CALLING FOR PARTY UNITY IN AN ELECTION YEAR.

AND SO, FACED WITH THE DAMAGING LOCKHEED SCANDAL, REVOLTS WITHIN THE PARTY RANKS, AND A DETERMINED OPPOSITION, THE MAJOR POLITICAL QUESTION AT THE MOMENT IN JAPAN IS WHETHER PRIME MINISTER MIKI WILL ONCE AGAIN WEATHER THE POLITICAL STORM AND WHAT EFFECTS THAT WILL WILL HAVE WHEN THE VOTERS GO TO THE POLLS.

JS/PBM